

TO THE  
INDUSTRIOUS CLASSES,

*On the Causes of the present Poverty and Misery.*

London, 9th Feb. 1820.

BELOVED COUNTRYMEN AND  
COUNTRYWOMEN.

The picture, which our country exhibits, at this moment, while it sinks our own hearts within us, fills the whole civilized world with woe and amazement. This country has been famed, in all ages, not only for its freedom and for the security its laws gave to person and property; but for the happiness of its people; for the comfort they enjoyed; for the neatness and goodness of their dress; the good quality and the abundance of their household furniture, bedding and utensils; and for the excellence and plenty of their food. So that a LORD CHANCELLOR, who, four hundred years ago, wrote a book on our laws, observes in that book, that, owing to these good laws and the security and freedom they gave, the English people possessed, in abundance, "*all things that conduce to make life easy and happy.*"

This was the state of our great grandfathers and great grandmothers, who little thought of what was to befall their descendants! The very name of England was pronounced throughout the world with respect. That very name was thought to mean high-spirit, impartial justice, freedom and happiness. What does it mean now? It means that which I have not the power to describe, nor the heart to describe, if I had the power. England now contains the most miserable people, that ever trod the earth. It is the seat of greater human suffering; of more pain of body and of mind, than was ever before heard of in the world. In countries, which have been deemed the most wretched, there never has existed wretchedness equal to that, which is now exhibited in this once flourishing, free and happy country.

In this country the law provides, that no human being shall suffer from want of food, lodging, or raiment. Our forefathers, when they gave security to property; when they made laws to give to the rich the safe enjoyment of their wealth, did not forget, that

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there must always be some *poor*, and that God wished, that the poor should not perish for want, they being entitled to an existence as well as the rich. Therefore, the *law* said, and it still says, that to make a *sure and certain provision for the poor*, is required by the first principles of civil society. He who is rich to-day may be poor to-morrow; and he is not to starve because he is become unfortunate.

Upon this principle of common humanity and of natural justice the *Poor Laws* were founded; and those laws give to every one a *right*, a *legal* as well as an equitable right, to be maintained out of the real property of the country, if, from whatever cause, *unable* to obtain a maintenance through his or her own exertions. To receive parish-relief is no *favour*! it is no gift that the relieved person receives; it is what the *law* insures him; and what he cannot be refused without a breach of the law, and without an outrageous act of injustice and oppression.

Such being the law; that is, the law having taken care, that relief shall always be at hand for the destitute, the law has forbidden *begging*. It has pointed out to every destitute person the place where he can obtain legal and effectual relief, and, therefore, it has said: "you shall not beg.

"If you *beg* you shall be punished." And, as we well know, punishment is frequently inflicted for begging.

But, what do we see before our eyes at this moment? We see, all over the kingdom, misery existing to such an extent, that the poor-laws are found insufficient, and that a system of *general beggary* is introduced, under the name of subscriptions, voluntary contributions, soup shops, and the like, and, in the Metropolis, where our eyes are dazzled with the splendour of those who live on the taxes, we see that a society has been formed for raising money to provide a receptacle for the *houseless poor* during the night; that is to say, to give a few hours shelter to wretched beings, who must otherwise lie down and die in the very streets! To-day we read of a poor man expiring on his removal from one country-parish to another. To-morrow we read of a poor woman, driven back from the door of one poor-house in London, carried back to expire in another poor-house before the morning. The next day we read of a man found dead in the street, and nearly a skeleton. While we daily see men harnessed and drawing carts loaded with gravel to repair the high-ways!

Is this *England*? Can this be *England*? and can these wretched



and miserable and degraded objects be *Englishmen*! Yes: this is England; with grief, shame, and indignation we must confess it; but, still we must confess that such is now once free and happy England! That same country that was, until of late years, famed throughout the world for all that was great, good, and amiable and enviable.

This change never can have taken place without *a cause*. There must have been something, and something done *by man* too, to produce this change, this disgraceful, this distressing, this horrible change. God has not afflicted the country with pestilence or with famine; nor has the land been invaded and ravaged by an enemy. Providence has of late, been more than ordinarily benevolent to us. Three successive *harvests* of uncommon abundance have blessed, or would have blessed, these Islands. *Peace* has been undisturbed. War appears not to have been even thought possible. The sounds of warlike glory have, even yet, hardly ceased to vibrate on our ears. And yet, in the midst of profound peace and abundant harvests the nation seems to be convulsed with the last struggles of gnawing hunger.

It is *man*, therefore, and not a *benevolent Creator*, who has been the cause of our sufferings, pre-

sent and past, and of the more horrid sufferings, which we now but reasonably anticipate. To *man*, therefore, must we look for *an account* for these evils, into the cause of which let us, without any want of charity, but, at the same time, without fear and without self-deception, freely inquire.

My good, honest, kind and industrious country-people, you have long been deceived by artful and intriguing and interested men, who have a *press* at their command, and who, out of taxes raised from your labour, have persuaded you, that your sufferings arise from nothing that *man* can cause or can *cure*. But, have only a little patience with me, and, I think, that I am able to convince you, that your sufferings and your degradation have arisen from the *weight of taxes imposed on you*, and from *no other cause whatever*.

When you consider, that your salt, pepper, soap, candles, sugar, tea, beer, shoes, and all other things are taxed, you must see, that you *pay taxes* yourselves; and, when you consider, that the taxes paid by your richer neighbours disable them from paying you so much in wages as they would otherwise pay you, you must perceive, that taxes are *dis-*

*advantageous* to you. In short, it is a fact, that no man can deny, that the poverty and misery of the people have gone on increasing precisely in the same degree that the taxes have gone on increasing.

The tax on salt is *fifteen shillings* a bushel. Its cost at the *sea-side*, where a kind Providence throws it abundantly on our shores, is *one shilling*. Owing to the delays and embarrassments arising from the tax, the price comes, at last, to *twenty shillings*! Thus, a bushel of salt, which is about as much as a middling family uses in a year (in all sorts of ways), costs to that family *eighteen shillings*, at least, *in tax*!—Now, if an industrious man's family had the 18s. in pocket, instead of paying them in tax, would not that family be the *better* for the change? If, instead of paying 6d. for a pot of beer, (if beer a man must have) he had to pay 2d. would not he be 4d. the richer? And, if the taxes were light instead of heavy, would not your wages and profits enable you to live better and dress better than you now do?

They, who have good health, good luck and small families, make a shift to go along with this

load of taxes. Others bend under it. Others come down to poverty. And a great part of these are pressed to the very earth, some ending their days in poor-houses, and others perishing from actual want. The farmers are daily falling into ruin; the little farmers fall first; the big ones become little, and the little ones become paupers, unless they escape from the country, while they have money enough to carry them away. Thousands of men of some property are, at this moment, preparing to quit the country. The *poor* cannot go; so that things, without a great change, will be worse and worse for all that remain, except for those who live upon the taxes.

And how are these taxes *disposed of*? We are told by impudent men, who live on these taxes, that *we*, the payers of the taxes, are become *too learned*; that we have been brought *too near* to the government; that is to say, that we have got a *peep behind the curtain*. It is well known, that a great deal has been said about *educating* the poor. At one time, even the *poverty* was ascribed to a *want of education* amongst the labouring classes.—They were *so ignorant*! and that was the cause of their misery.—



And poor Mr. WHITEHEAD said, that the *Scotch* were better than the English, only because they were *better educated*. But now, behold, we are *too well educated*: we are *too knowing*; we have approached *too near* to the government; and, therefore, *new laws* have been passed to keep us at a greater distance; a *more respectful* distance.

This precaution comes, however, too late. We have had our look behind the curtain. We cannot be again deluded. We cannot be made to *unknow* that which we know. We know, that the fruit of our labour is *mortgaged* to those, who have lent money to the government. We know, that to pay the interest of this mortgage; to pay a standing army in time of peace; to pay the tax-gatherers; and to pay place-men and pensioners, we are so heavily taxed, that we can no longer live in comfort, and that many of us are wholly destitute of food, and are brought to our deaths by hunger.

Endeavours have been made to persuade us, that *we* are not hurt by the taxes. It has been said, that taxes *come back* to us, and are a *great blessing* to us. And Mr. Justice Bailey has lately taken occasion to say from *the Bench*, that a *National Debt* is a good thing, and even a *necessary* thing. England did pretty well without a

Debt for *seven hundred years*! How this matter came to be talked of *from the Bench* I do not pretend to know; but, for my part, I look upon a national debt as the greatest curse that ever afflicted a people. In our country it has made a happy people miserable, and a free people slaves. And, I am convinced, that, unless that debt be *got rid of*, in some way or other, and that, too, in a short time, this country will fall so low, that a century will not see it revive.

Those, who wish to make us believe, that it is not the taxes that make us poor and miserable, tell us that they *come back* to us. This being a grand source of delusion I will endeavour to explain the matter to you. I have before done it many times; but, all eyes are not opened at the first operation; and, besides, there are, every month, some young persons who are beginning to read about such things.

BURKE, of whom many of you never heard, said, that *taxes* were *dews*, drawn up by the *blessed Sun of government*, and sent down again upon the people in refreshing and fructifying *showers*. This was a very pretty description, but very false. For taxes, though they fall in *heavy showers* upon one part of the community never return to another part of it. To those who *live on taxes*, the taxes

are, indeed, refreshing and fructifying showers; but, to those who *pay them*, they are a scorching sun, and a blighting wind.—They draw away the riches of the soil, and they render it sterile and unproductive. But, how came this BURKE to talk in this way? Why, he was one of those, *who lived upon the taxes!* Very fine and refreshing and fertilizing showers fell upon *him*. He had a pension of *three thousand pounds a year for his life*; his wife, *fifteen hundred pounds a year for her life*; and besides these, he obtained, in 1795, grants of money to be paid yearly to his executors *after his death!* And, not a trifle neither; for he took care to get thus settled upon *executors*, *two thousand five hundred pounds a year*. The following is a copy of the grant.

“To the Executors of Edmund Burke, 2,500l. a year.  
 “Granted by two patents,  
 “dated 24 October, 1795.—  
 “One for 1,160l. a year, to  
 “be paid, during the life of  
 “Lord Royston, and the  
 “Rev. and Hon. Auchild  
 “Grey. The other for 1,340l.  
 “to be paid, during the life  
 “of the Princess Amelia,  
 “Lord Althorp, and William  
 “Cavendish, Esq.”

Now, as Mr. GREY is still alive, and as Lord Althorp and

Mr. Cavendish are alive, the money is all of it still paid to the executors of BURKE; these executors have already received, on this account *more than fifty thousand pounds* in principal money; and, as there is no probability of the death of the gentlemen above named, they may yet receive double the sum. BURKE's pension, while he was alive, cost the nation about *twenty thousand pounds*; and his wife's about *four thousand pounds*. So that here are about *seventy four thousand pounds* already paid by the public on account of this one man, and that, too, in *principal money*, without reckoning interest!

This, you will allow, must have been to Burke, his wife and executors, an exceedingly *refreshing and fructifying shower!* But, not so to those, who have had to *pay* this money. It has not tended to *refresh* us. In the space of twenty seven years seventy four thousand pounds have been taken from us, who pay the taxes, on account of this *one man*. Now, suppose a different mode from the present were used in making us pay taxes. The pensions have, for the last 27 years, amounted to 2,740 pounds a year. Suppose the amount of them to have been raised upon *fifty tradesmen*, at 54l. a year each. Would not



each of these tradesmen be now 2,700 pounds poorer than they would have been, if they had not had these "*refreshing showers*" to send off in dews? Suppose them to be raised upon 400 labourers at about 10 pounds each. Must not these 400 labourers be made poor and miserable, must they not be prevented from saving a penny; and must they not, at last, be brought to the poor-house by these "*refreshing showers*?" Is not this as plain as the nose upon your face? Is it not plain that this pension to the executors of this man now takes away the means of comfortable living from nearly *four hundred labourers families*? Has not this been going on for twenty seven years; and has one single man, in parliament, made even an effort to put a stop to it? Has one single man moved even for an *inquiry* into the matter? And yet, the facts are all before the parliament in their own printed reports!

And what *services* did this BURKE render the country? For, to give such a man such enormous sums, there must have been *some reason*. His services were these: He *deserted his party in the Opposition*: and he wrote three pamphlets to urge the nation on to war, and to cause it to persevere in the war, against the republicans of France! Which war raised the

annual taxes from *sixteen millions* a year in time of peace, to *fifty three millions* a year in time of peace, and the poor rates from *two millions* a year to about *twelve millions* a year? These were the *services*, which were so great, that it was not sufficient to give him *three thousand pounds* a year for them during his *life-time*, but we must still pay his executors *two thousand five hundred pounds* a year; and may have to pay them *this for fifty years yet to come!*

Need we wonder that we are poor? Need we wonder, that we are miserable? Need we wonder, that we have, at last, come to see Englishmen *harnessed* and drawing carts, loaded with gravel? And, if we complain of these things, are we to be told, that we are *seditionous*? Are we to be told, that we wish to *destroy* the constitution? Are we to be *imprisoned, fined and banished*?

When we take a view of the effects of *taxation*, our wonder at all we see instantly ceases. We look no further for the cause of our misery. And, is there any one, who proposes to *lighten the load*? Not a man. On the contrary, every measure has a tendency to make it heavier and heavier. The act, passed last session, respecting the payment in gold bars has produced double the quantity of misery that before existed. It has diminished

the quantity of paper money, and, in the same proportion, has added to the weight of the taxes and to the want of employment for artizans, manufacturers and labourers. Let me explain to you how this effect is produced; for, it is fit that you all clearly understand what is the cause of your misery.

When money, whether it be *paper or gold*, is abundant, every thing is *high in price*. Now suppose there to be a community of only ten men, who have a given number of dealings amongst them in a year, and who move from hand to hand a certain quantity of valuable things. Suppose one of them to be a farmer, and that he has to sell wheat to the rest, and suppose his wheat to sell for 10s. a bushel. We will suppose, next, that the quantity of money, possessed by the *whole* community to be six hundred pounds. Every one has his due proportion according to his property. Now, suppose, that, by some accident or other, every man, just at the same moment, loses one half of his money. The effect of this would be, that every one could give for the things that he would want of every other one, only just *half as much* as he gave before; and, of course, the farmer must sell his wheat for 5s. a bushel. The shoe-maker must

sell his shoes at 5s. a pair instead of 10s. and so on.

This change would produce injury to no one; because a pair of shoes would still bring a bushel of wheat. There would be less money; but money is merely a thing to be used as a measure of the value of useful things. This little community would still have a just measure of value; and, though prices would fall one half, no soul would suffer from the change. But, suppose the shoe-maker to have *owed* the farmer *fifty shillings* before the change took place. The shoe-maker would lose greatly by the change; but, the farmer would (if he were a yeomanryman, at least) call upon poor Crispin to pay him; and Crispin must give him *ten* pair of shoes (or the price of ten pair) instead of *five*. So that, in fact, Crispin's debt, though still only *fifty shillings* in name, would, by the diminution in the whole quantity of money, be *doubled*.

This is *our* case precisely! The fund-holders, the army, the navy, the placemen, the pensioners, lent their money to the government, took places and pensions under the government, and, in fact, made the nation their *debtor* for *so much a year*. But, now that the quantity of the money is reduced in such a way as to bring down prices nearly one half, the



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nation has to pay them all to the full nominal amount; which, though it be still called by the same name, is, in fact, nearly *double* what it was before the quantity of money was reduced. Each of you has *fifteen shillings* tax to pay on a bushel of salt; and, so you had before: but, as fifteen shillings will now purchase *twice* as much of your labour as they would purchase before, your salt tax is in fact *doubled*.

Thus it is as to the whole nation. It has about *thirty millions* a year to pay to fund-holders, but *now*, the thirty are equal to what *sixty* would have been when the money was borrowed. Suppose a fund-holder to have lent the government a *hundred pounds* twelve years ago; and suppose, that he was to receive five per cent. for it. Suppose a farmer had been to pay the interest in wheat. *Six bushels and two thirds* would have paid the five pounds. But, *now* it would require *thirteen bushels and a third* to pay the five pounds. Thus it is that the fund-holders, and all who are paid out of the taxes *gain*, and those who pay the taxes *lose*, by a diminution in the quantity of money. And this adds greatly to the evils, which naturally arise out of heavy taxes. And thus it is, that a nation is *scourged*, not by God, but by those works of man, a national debt and a paper-money.

But, you will say, *how* can the Bank lessen the quantity of money, and ruin the people thus by doubling the real amount of debts and salaries and pensions and other incomes of those who live on taxes? I will tell you how. The Bank can make as much paper-money as it pleases. The cost of it is merely the paper and the print. There are always *borrowers* enough. Now, I want to borrow. I go to the Bank and give them a note for a hundred pounds, which I promise to pay them again in two months. They take my note, and give me the hundred pounds in their *paper-money*, taking the two months' interest out. This interest is called *discount*; and this is called *discounting* a note. The Bank can discount as much or as little as it pleases. When I bring my hundred pounds, and take the note out of pawn, I may get another note discounted if the Bank choose; and, in this way, the paper-money gets about. But, if the Bank have a mind to cause the quantity of money in the country to *grow less*, it *refuses to discount*, or, it discounts *less* than it did. Suppose the Bank have ten hundred notes and have lent out paper-money upon them; and, suppose, when the paper-money is brought in to pay off the notes with, the Bank will

lend out paper again for only five hundred of the notes. In this case the paper-money in circulation is diminished *one half*; and, of course, *prices fall*, and, as we have seen, *taxes rise* in real amount.

This is what has been now done; and what is more, it has been done with a professed desire to *remove the evils* that afflict the country! The pay of the placemen, pensioners, fundholders, soldiers, and of all those who live on the taxes has thus been augmented; and by the same means, those who pay the taxes have been ruined. The labouring classes, in all such cases, suffer most severely; but, when they are quite down, they can fall no lower. They fall into the ranks of the paupers, and there they remain. There is another class, however, who will endeavour to save themselves: I mean those who have, as yet, *some property left*. They will flee from the dismal and desolating plague. They will carry their creative industry and their capital with them. And will thus leave the burden greater for those whose timidity makes them remain behind. Thousands are preparing to go to America. And, unless something be *speedily* done to relieve us, they act wisely. It is, on an average, only *a month at sea*. The danger is nothing.

And, when a man reflects, that he has left the tax-gatherer behind him, and can now set him at defiance, what are dangers of the sea, or any other dangers? One would escape out of England and even out of the world to avoid the sight of men *harnessed and drawing carts*, loaded with gravel for the repair of the highways.

No man, you will observe, proposes to do any thing that has a tendency to relieve our distress. The very measure for diminishing the quantity of paper-money is only *beginning* to operate. It has not yet produced a tenth part of the evils that it is calculated to produce, and that it will produce, if persevered in. The Labouring classes, I mean, those who have no property in any thing but their labour, cannot fall much lower. Hundreds die for want of a sufficiency of food; but *hundreds of thousands will not*. And, as they have not the means of going to America, they will remain, and will *live* somehow or other; for, as to being transported to Canada or the Cape of Good-Hope, they neit h r will nor can.

The means of restoration are, however, *easy*. The affairs of the nation *might* be retrieved, and that, too, in a short space of time; and, if I am asked, *why I do not suggest those easy means*, my answer is, that I have done all that a private individual could do to *prevent the evils*; for all



my efforts, I have, except by the people, been repaid in abuse and persecution; and that, therefore, in the capacity of a *writer*, I will suggest nothing in the way of remedy. My former efforts have been treated with scorn, and now let the scorers extricate themselves. If I were in *parliament*, I would point out the means. Not being there I will point out none. Those who have property at stake, have, *even now*, the means of putting me there. If they do, my opinion is, that measures of salvation will be adopted; if they do not, I am of opinion that no such measures will even be *proposed*. In either case I shall have the satisfaction to reflect, that I have done my duty; and whether the country be doomed to anarchy or despotism I am as able to bear the scourge as another.

Amongst our duties are the duties which we owe ourselves: and, amongst those duties is that of not suffering ourselves to be degraded. And, for my part, I should deem it degradation to the last degree to be an *underworker* of such men as those, who have brought this once free and happy nation into its present state. An endeavour to serve the country in this way would, too, be wholly unavailing. It would only tend to amuse and deceive. And, therefore, I will never attempt it. I will hear the schemes of others. If they adopt any thing that I have already laid down, I will claim it as my own. If they broach any thing new, I will offer my opinions on it; but, *unless in parliament*, the thing, for me,

shall take its course. I, at present, owe nothing to the country, except to the Labouring classes. If I am placed in parliament, it will be my duty to do much, and much I shall do: if I am not placed there, the country will have no demand upon me. Even in the utter ruin and abasement of the country I shall be neither ruined nor abased. Not to possess wealth is nothing to him who does not desire it; and, as to reputation, the world would have the justice to say, that I have lost none by events which I had foreseen and foretold, and which I had endeavoured to prevent, and for which endeavours I had been most furiously persecuted.

My beloved Countrymen and Countrywomen, think of these things; and, be assured that, under all circumstances, I shall bear about me and carry with me to the grave the kindest feelings towards you, and the most anxious wishes for your happiness.

I am,

Your friend,

And obedient servant,

WM. COBBETT.

#### TO THE REFORMERS.

*On the subject of raising a sum of money for the purpose of defraying the expences attending the securing of a seat in Parliament at the next Election.*

London, Feb. 5, 1820.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW COUNTRYMEN,  
AND COUNTRYWOMEN,

The sum of money which I wished you to put me in possession of, under

the name of a **FUND FOR REFORM**, will, I can clearly see, be raised by the time that I should think it necessary to employ it. But the death of the King has made me anxious to appeal to you for a purpose, which I think proper openly to avow; and that is, the obtaining of the means of securing a seat in the House of Commons; which seat great numbers of you are certainly very anxious that I should obtain. Before I proceed further, in speaking of the utility of my being in Parliament, suffer me to say some little matter with regard to the calumnies which have been heaped upon me by the atrocious Daily Press of the metropolis; by the still more atrocious Quarterly Review, and by almost the whole of the country newspapers. I shall go back further than may be thought necessary, in order that you may see me from the beginning. For, upon this particular occasion, I am desirous that you should have all the means of judging fairly, between me and those by whom I have so long been assailed.

At eleven years of age my employment was clipping of box-edgings and weeding beds of flowers in the garden of the Bishop of Winchester, at the Castle of Farnham, my native town. I had always been fond of beautiful gardens; and, a gardener, who had just come from the King's gardens at Kew, gave such a description of them as made me instantly resolve to work in these gardens. The next morning, without saying a word to any one, off I set, with no clothes, except those upon my back, and with thirteen halfpence in my pocket. I found that I must go to Richmond, and I, accordingly, went on, from place to place, inquiring my way thither. A long day (it was in June) brought me to Richmond in the afternoon. Twopenny worth of bread and cheese and a pennyworth of small beer, which I had on the road, and one half-penny that I had lost somehow or other, left three pence in my pocket. With this for my whole fortune, I was trudging

through Richmond, in my blue smock-frock and my red garters tied under my knees, when, staring about me, my eye fell upon a little book, in a bookseller's window, on the outside of which was written: "**TALE OF A TUB; PRICE 3d.**" The title was so odd, that my curiosity was excited. I had the 3d. but, then, I could have *no supper*. In I went, and got the little book, which I was so impatient to read, that I got over into a field, at the upper corner of Kew gardens, where there stood a *hay-stack*. On the shady side of this, I sat down to read. The book was so different from any thing that I had ever read before: it was something so *new* to my mind, that, though I could not at all understand some of it, it delighted me beyond description; and it produced what I have always considered a sort of birth of intellect. I read on till it was dark, without any thought about supper or bed. When I could see no longer, I put my little book in my pocket, and tumbled down by the side of the stack, where I slept till the birds in Kew Gardens awaked me in the morning; when off I started to Kew, reading my little book. The singularity of my dress, the simplicity of my manner, my confident and lively air, and, doubtless, his own compassion besides, induced the gardener, who was a Scotsman, I remember, to give me victuals, find me lodging, and set me to work. And, it was during the period that I was at Kew, that the present king and two of his brothers laughed at the oddness of my dress, while I was sweeping the grass plat round the foot of the Pagoda. The gardener, seeing me fond of books, lent me some gardening books to read; but, these I could not relish after my *Tale of a Tub*, which I carried about with me wherever I went, and when I, at about twenty years old, lost it in a box that fell overboard in the Bay of Funday in North America, the loss gave me greater pain than I have ever felt at losing thousands of pounds.

This circumstance, trifling as it was,



and childish as it may seem to relate it, has always endeared the recollection of *Kew* to me. About five weeks ago, I had occasion to go from Chelsea to Twickenham with my two eldest sons. I brought them back through *Kew*, in order to *show them the place where the hay-stack stood*; having frequently related to them what I have now related to you.

Far be it from me to suppose, that you want any thing to convince you, that the numerous *foul accusations*, made against me by the public press, are *wholly false*. But, upon this occasion, permit me to say, that it is not unnecessary, and that it is but bare justice to you, justice to your discernment and your virtue, for me to show, that you have not conferred such marks of respect on one who is unworthy of them.

You have how, and at what an age, I started in the world. Those of you, who are *mothers* will want nothing but the involuntary impulse of your own hearts to carry your minds back to the alarm, the fears and anxieties of my most tender mother. But, if I am "an *extraordinary man*," as I have been called by some persons, who ought to have found out a different epithet, I was a still more extraordinary *boy*. For, though I never returned home for any length of time, and never put my parents to a farthing in expence, after the time above-mentioned, I was always a most dutiful son, never having, in my whole life, wilfully and deliberately disobeyed either my father or my mother. I carried in my mind their precepts against *drinking* and *gaming*; and I have never been drunk and have never played at any game in my life. When in the army I was often tempted to take up the cards. But, the words of my father came into my mind, and rescued me from the peril. Exposed, as you must well know, to all sorts of temptations; young, strong, adventurous, uncommonly gay and greatly given to talk; still, I never in my whole life, was brought before a ma-

gistrate, either as defendant or complainant. And, even up to *this hour*, about *five oaths* are all that I have ever taken, notwithstanding the multitude and endless variety of affairs, in which I have been engaged. I entered the army at *sixteen*, and quitted it at *twenty-five*. I never was once even *accused* of a fault of any sort. At *nineteen* I was promoted to *Serjeant-Major* from a Corporal, over the heads of nearly fifty serjeants. While my regiment was abroad, I received the public and official thanks of the Governor of the Province for my zeal in the King's service; while no officer of the regiment received any thanks at all. Many years after this, this same Governor (General Carleton) came to see me and to claim the pleasure of my acquaintance. When I quitted the army at Portsmouth, I had a discharge, bearing on it, that I had been discharged at my own request, *and in consequence of the great services I had rendered the king's service in that regiment*. During this part of my life I lived amongst, and was compelled to associate with, the most beastly of drunkards, where liquor was so cheap, that even a soldier might be drunk every day; yet I never, during the whole time, even *tasted* of any of that liquor. My father's, and more especially my mother's precepts were always at hand to protect me.

In 1792, I went to the United States of America. There I became a *writer*. I understood little at that time; but the utmost of my ability was exerted on the side of *my country*, though I had been greatly disgusted at the trick that had been played me in England, with regard to a court-martial, which I had demanded upon some officers. I forgot every thing when the honour of England was concerned. The king's minister in America made me offers of *reward*. I refused to accept of any, in any shape whatever. Reward was offered me, when I came home. I always refused to take one single penny from the government. If I had been to be

*bought*, judge you, my countrywomen, how *rich*, and even how *high*, I might have been at this day! But, I value the present received from the females of Lancashire a million times higher than all the money and all the titles which ministers and kings have to bestow.

Driven again across the Atlantic to avoid a *dungeon*, deprived of *pen, ink, or paper*, I still adhered faithfully to my beloved, though oppressed and miserable, country. I overcame every difficulty; and, to the surprise of friends and the confusion of enemies, caused a Register to be published once a week in London, though I was on the other side of the sea. And, while there, though I did much to benefit that country in the way of *agriculture*, I never did any act or uttered any word, that should seem to say, that I had abandoned England. If I had preferred tranquillity and ease and comfort to duty, I should not have returned; but have called my family to me. But, I have never had an idea of happiness distinct from the happiness and honour of my country. The greater her distress, the more necessary the presence of those of her sons, who possess abilities to assist in saving her.

The calumnies of the London daily press, and of a great part of the weekly press and the country press, together with the *Quarterly Review*, have been so numerous, that I can only notice them in the gross. These cowardly libellers have exhibited me as a *fraudulent debtor*, and yet as being *without a shilling*. These calumnies answer themselves. But, if either were true, should I *voluntarily have come home*; and that, too, at a great expense? It is very true, that the sudden breaking up of my affairs, in 1817, following a total loss of *six thousand pounds and upwards* arising from the imprisonment and fine I had to endure for expressing my horror at seeing local-militia men flogged, in the heart of England, under a guard of German Bayonets: it is very true, that

these things, together with all the expenses attending a flight to, and a return from, America, leave me comparatively destitute of immediate pecuniary means. But, was it ever before heard of in the world, that, in answer to a man's political writings, his books of account are to be produced; a list of his pecuniary engagements published; and, what is more, his *private letters*, written in confidence many, many years before, obtained from a base and treacherous agent, and published to the world, and that, too, in a partial and garbled state? Was a thing like this ever heard of in this world before; and is there, on this side the grave, a punishment adequate to so foul and so detested a deed? Consider, too, that my wife and daughters were here to support, to bear up *in silence* against all the reproaches, all the scoffs, all the taunts, all the savage insults of this numerous and united band of literary ruffians!

These cowardly and brutal men have represented me as being a harsh, tyrannical, passionate, merciless, and even greedy man. I have said before that, in the whole course of my life, I never was once before a Magistrate in any criminal case, either as accuser or accused; and that is a great deal to say, at the end of fifty-three years, and having no one to protect or advise me since I was eleven years old. Very few men can say as much. There is hardly a quaker that can say as much, though he be much younger than I am. I never, in the whole course of my life, brought an action against any man for debt, though I have lost thousands of pounds by not doing it. Where is there a man so long engaged in business of various sorts, as I have been, who can say as much? I know of no such man. I never could find in my heart to oppress any man merely because he had not the ability to pay. I lose money by acting thus; but I did not lose my good opinion of myself, and that was far more valuable than money. Nor



have I ever had an action brought against me for debt, in all my life time, until since this my last return to England; when an Attorney at Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire, had a writ served upon me, *without any notice; without even writing to me for the money*; and, what is more horrible still, the Sheriff's Officer was sent to a public Meeting, at the Crown and Anchor, and *desired to arrest me there, at the very time that I should be addressing the Meeting*. The Officer had more decency and more honour than to lend himself to such a base purpose. He followed me to my lodging; called out a gentleman who was with me, requested that I would call at his house the next day, which I did. This malicious act was perpetrated by the Attorney of one Stares, a Maltster at Droxford. The debt was for about thirty pounds; a thing which I had totally forgotten, the malt having been served during the year before I went to America. This is the only action that has, in the whole course of my life, ever been brought against me for debt. Can any man say as much, who has been in a great way of business, of various kinds, during more than twenty years? I have employed, for a great many years, numerous servants and labourers at Botley. I seldom had less than seventeen, altogether; and I never had to complain of any of them to a magistrate but three times in my life; and, of all my servants and labourers, no one ever went to a magistrate to complain of me. When the printers *turned out for wages*, in London, my then printer, Hansard, in order, as he said, to break the *conspiracy*, as he called it; of the men, asked me to *suspend* the publication of the Register for a week. My answer was, "no: the men have a right to as much wages as they can get: give the men their wages; and, if you must raise your price, I must pay accordingly." At this very time, WALTER, of the TIMES, one of my principal calumniators, was cramming printers into jail by half-

dozens, on a charge of conspiracy to raise their wages. These are the men that have calumniated me; and represented me as a harsh and tyrannical man.

I have seven children. The greater part of whom are fast approaching the state of young men and young women. *I never struck one of them in anger, in my life*; and I recollect *only one single instance in which I have ever spoke to one of them in a really angry tone and manner*. And, when I had so done, it appeared as if my heart was gone out of my body. It was but once; and I hope it will never be again. Are there many men who can say as much as this? To my servants, I have been the most kind and indulgent of masters; and I have been repaid, in general, by their fidelity and attachment. Two consummate villains I have met with. But their treachery, though of the blackest die, will by no means tend to make me distrustful or ill-tempered. The attachment and devotion, which I have experienced from others, exceeds even the perfidy of these two black-hearted men, who, besides, have yet to be rendered as notorious as they are infamous. These two diabolical fellows have been the instruments in the hands of the proprietors of what Lord CASTLEREAGH calls "the respectable part of the press." Each of them is in possession of a considerable number of private letters of mine. These the wretches pull out and exhibit to the newspaper proprietors, as occasion may serve; though to these men I have been a most generous benefactor; and my only faults, with regard to them, are, that I did not *transport the one*, and that I *employed* the other.

Such men will always be found in the world; and we must take the world as we find it. But, were there ever before found in the world, men, the proprietors of *Literary Journals*; men having pretensions to the character of gentlemen; men pretending to moral decency; men admitted into honourable society: were there ever be-

fore found in the world men in this walk of life, and having these pretensions, ready and willing to make their pages the vehicle of slanders drawn from a source so polluted! Never! and, to all the other disgraces, which now stain our country, we have to add this: a press almost wholly divested of every one of those characteristics, which have heretofore rendered the press a thing to be held in estimation and honour.

If I were disposed to *retaliate* upon two or three of the *setters-on* of these two perfidious monsters; if I were disposed to retaliate upon *one*, who has, in some measure, given countenance to their perfidy, by following their example, *how miserable during life, could I render that man!* But, no! the example is too horrible for me to think of following it. Besides, if the public can view this breach of private confidence without feelings of detestation towards the wretches who have been guilty of it, no exposure that any man can make, will excite such feelings against them: and, therefore, for my part, I never retaliate. I keep the means of doing of it in my hands, and forbear to do it, that my children may learn sentiments of generosity, and may contract a fixed opinion that nothing is to produce a *breach of private confidence*.

As to *forgiveness* towards the *literary* assassins, that is never to be expected from me. For myself, I have the power of chastisement in my hands; but, for their base and barbarous conduct, during my absence, *towards my wife and daughters*, whose lives they rendered one continued series of mortification and of grief; if, for this, *I do not bring them to some signal degree of suffering, it will only be for the want of the power of doing it*. Two or three BARRISTERS, too, have joined in the scandalous cowardice and barbarity, not to mention some persons in *another place*, from whom nothing that was just or fair no man expected.

Evil seldom is wholly unattended

with good of some sort. Thus has it happened here. The outrageous slanders uttered against me, the falshood of which nobody so well knew as my own family, have had a tendency to make me, if possible, still dearer to that family. To feelings of filial affection uncommonly strong have been added, in the breasts of my children, an ardent desire to see me triumph over my enemies, and to inflict vengeance on them. My sons, three of whom are from *sixteen to twenty-one* years, and who, of course, must detest the very idea of belonging, even in appearance, to the same profession, which contains the cowardly, savage, and perfidious men, by whom their father has been assailed, have, nevertheless, made up their mind to sacrifice the gratification of every natural desire of their own, in order to stand by him, and to obtain justice on the insulters of their mother and their sisters. My daughters, equally devoted to their father and their mother, wrote to me upon my landing: "Think nothing about *us* and our *feelings*. We are now able to labour. We can earn our bread. We shall think it no disgrace to do it. Nothing that we can do will ever half repay you and dear mama for your matchless tenderness towards us; and, as to the indulgence of *pride*, we shall always have enough of that in being able to say, that we are *your children*, and that we have, we hope, always been, and always shall be, your dutiful and affectionate daughters."

Upon reading this letter, I should have wished fire and brimstone to fall upon and consume the country, which contained the savage ruffians, whose base calumnies had awakened these apprehensions. But I was, at that moment surrounded by a part of YOU, my beloved countrymen and countrywomen! I was in the midst of the brave, just, and enlightened Reformers of Lancashire, whose generous congratulations wiped the tears from my eyes. And, though the public effect



of those congratulations, of your addresses, and of the many marks of respect and of confidence which you have been pleased to bestow on me, from all parts of the country; though the *public* effect of these have been great, the effect in *my own family* has been still greater. You have given a degree of pleasure to that family, which you will much more easily conceive than I can describe. My sons are ready to stand or fall with you, and my wife and daughters would scorn the enjoyment of any happiness which was not participated in by your wives and children.

To YOU, however, I do, and I must, look for support in my public efforts. As far as the *press* can go, I want no assistance. Aided by my sons, I have already made the ferocious cowards of the London Press sneak into silence. But, there is a large range, a more advantageous ground to stand on, and that is the *House of Commons*. If I were there the ferocious cowards of the press would be *compelled*, through their *three hundred mouths*, to tell the nation all that I should say; or, if they would not, they must give place to men who *would*. And, it is easy to imagine what I should say, how much I should do. A great effect on the public mind I have already produced; but, what should I produce in only the next session, if I were in the House of Commons! Yet, there I cannot be without YOUR ASSISTANCE. Therefore, to you, the Reformers in every part of the kingdom, I appeal for that assistance.

That it is perfectly *lawful* to subscribe for such a purpose we know by the proceedings of others; and, recollect, that PERCEVAL's opinion was taken upon the subject, in the case of that creature MAJNWARING, and he gave an opinion, being then Solicitor-General, that to subscribe was *lawful*, and he added, that he himself had subscribed.

The "*Fund for Reform*," I shall, for the present, divert to this more pressing object; so that that may go on, un-

der its present name, or under this new appellation. The parliament may be dissolved in *less than a week*; so that, now there is *no time to be lost*. I would not call upon you for a farthing; but, tuated as I am, I should not, if I were to go, on this account, to any expence out of my own means, act prudently with regard to myself nor justly towards others. What will be the sum required I cannot exactly say. *Two thousand pounds* perhaps; a little more or less. But, whatever there may be over a sufficiency, shall be applied to the purpose of the *Cause of Reform*. Something approaching nearly 200 pounds has been already *actually received* towards the *Fund for Reform*. This fund will now be applied to the present avowed purpose.

As to *myself*, all the world must know, that I have no value for *money*, otherwise than as it conduces to objects like this. I am aware, that it will be said, that if I had been careful of my *own* money, this appeal to YOU would not have been necessary. Very true; but, then, I should not have been *the man I am*: observe that. To be careful of money; to sue and be sued; to squabble about shillings and pennies: these are wholly incompatible with the pursuit of great public objects. No extravagance, of any sort, have I ever indulged in. In my whole life I never spent one evening away from my own home and without some part, at least, of my family, if I was not at a distance from that home. Except at about *ten* public dinners, I have never, during the 28 years that I have been married, eat a meal or drunk a drop, in a public house of any description, except upon a journey, or at a temporary lodging. I have never indulged in extravagance of any kind; and, as to my wife, though she is, doubtless, equalled by many, in point of prudence and economy, no one ever excelled her. She has always been kind and generous to poor neighbours in distress; and has always been as sparing as possi-

ble with regard to all other expences. In her *example* she will give her daughters a far more valuable inheritance than I could have raked together by sharp-dealing and by close-fistedness. The two atrocious wretches, who are now showing my private letters about London, and are serving as informers to the ruffians of the Daily Press, my wife always disliked and suspected. The one she called a "a *simpering knave*," the other "a *down-looking rogue*." Over and over again, a thousand times, she worried me to take care of these men! Women are quicker-sighted than we are. They penetrate into character more quickly. And of this, her prejudices against these two accomplished monsters of ingratitude and perfidy, is a striking proof.

This is "*egotism*," "*disgusting egotism*," the ruffians of the press will exclaim! They first assail me with atrocious falsehoods, and then, when I defend myself, they call it *egotism*. These brutal men have been taunting, scoffing at, galling, mortifying and in all ways annoying my defenceless wife and family, during my absence: and, is it not right that the world should know, what sort of persons those are, whom the savages have thus treated? Is there a father, is there a mother, is there a kind and dutiful child, in this country of kind-hearted people, who will not, upon this occasion, feel, as I, my wife, and our children feel?

And what have I done to merit the reproach of any man? I have done, during my whole life, every thing in my power to serve my country. I contracted, at an early age, high notions of love and duty towards my country. It has been my *pride* to be an Englishman. I have been blessed with a sound body and a sound mind. I possess them still, and in their vigour too: and my only desire now is, to be able to exert their powers for the salvation of my distressed and tottering country.

I am my, beloved Countrymen and Countrywomen, your faithful friend,

WM. COBBETT.

## TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND.

*On the Laws, recently passed, relative to the Press.*

London, 29th January, 1820.

I have elsewhere endeavoured to describe the nature and tendency of these laws; but, upon this signal occasion, I think it proper to repeat this description, in substance at least; and to accompany it with such remarks as appear to me likely to be of general utility. The law allows no man to plead *ignorance* of it; because, says BLACKSTONE, "*every Englishman is supposed to be present in Parliament, and to give his assent to the law, either in his own person, or in that of his representative.*" A representative, like the holder of a power of attorney, is, to be sure, a man chosen by the person represented, and not chosen by others; and, therefore, how can we say, that every man at Manchester is, at the making of a law, present in the person of a man chosen by the two or three electors of Gatton or of Old Sarum? However, be this as it may, the law allows no one to plead *ignorance* of it; and, therefore, it is the duty of a man, placed in my situation, to make the nature and tendency of our laws known, as well for the information of the public as for the purpose of showing that public the magnitude of the perils, by which every writer is now surrounded.

During the month's legislation three Acts have been passed, relative to the press. The first of these imposes stamps in such a way as to put a stop to cheap publications, touching on matters of



Church or State. It compels the proprietor to enter (*before he begins publishing*) into bonds, with two or more sureties, for the payment of *any fine*, that may, in case of conviction for libel, be inflicted on him. And then, it enables *any justice of the peace*, upon a charge of libel being made against any printer, publisher, or proprietor, to cause the accused person to be taken up, and to give bail, not only to *answer the charge*; but, also to *be of good behaviour in the mean time*.

Let us stop here, and contemplate the character and the natural consequences of these provisions. The *previous bonds* are nothing, when compared to the *binding over*. But, what says BLACKSTONE as to the press? He boasts greatly of this branch of English freedom. He says, that there can be *no liberty at all*, where there is not liberty of the press. And he says, that this liberty consists not in men being answerable for what *they have published*; but, in their *not being subject to any previous restraint*. These previous bonds, then, sweep away Blackstone's liberty of the press. For what is *previous restraint*, if these bonds be not? A man dares not *even begin to publish*, 'till he has given bonds with *two or more sureties*! It is easy for a man to enter into bonds himself! but is it easy for him to *find sureties*; and, especially, when it is considered, that the only publishers whom to restrain is the object of the law, must already be *marked men*? Is it easy, under such circumstances, to find sureties?

And, suppose the sureties found: will the *bounden* man be as *free* as he would have been without such bonds? Will his pen not

move continually loaded with the recollection of the bonds, into which his friends have entered for him? It is not *himself* that is put in jeopardy; but his friends. Can a man so situated, be said to be left at liberty to write and publish *what he pleases*? Is he not, in fact, writing under constant *restraint*, not only of his own natural apprehensions, but of the fears and remonstrances of his friends? Can such a man be called *free*, and can he be said to enjoy *liberty of the press*?

There is no deed, however odious in its tendency and in its very nature, that craft and perverseness may not endeavour to gloss over. And, upon this occasion, it has been said, that this is *no new thing*; that it is not hostile to the *spirit of the law*; for that men are, in many cases, *bound with sureties beforehand*. Publicans, I believe, and, I know, that owners of vessels of a certain tonnage give bond with sureties, not to be engaged in, or, at least, to employ the vessels in *smuggling*. But, in the name of common sense, what analogy is there in the two cases? The ship-owner knows well *what smuggling is*. He knows that he is safe, and that his bonds are a nullity, as long as he refrains from taking certain specific articles into his ship. But, does a writer know *what a libel is*? Can he know, when he sees Paine's Age of Reason prosecuted, while the writings of Hume and Gibbon, are not only not prosecuted, but every where read, and every where sold? Can he know, when Mr. HONE, upon being prosecuted for certain *parodies* brings forward scores of parodies, upon the very same subjects, which have never been prosecuted?—

Can he know, when he sees Mr. HONE acquitted for first publishing certain parodies; and when he sees many poor men, in different parts of the country, convicted, and most severely punished for selling those *very same parodies*? Can he know, when the law does not tell him what *blasphemy* is; when the dictionary tells him, that it is "*the offering of an indignity unto God himself*;" and when he sees men convicted of blasphemy, and most tremendously punished, though they have been most strenuous, eloquent and fervent in extolling the praise and glory of God, and have only expressed their disbelief in the Christian Faith? Can he know, when the law (as it now stands) makes any thing a *seditious libel*, which has a TENDENCY to bring *either House of Parliament into contempt*? Can he tell what shall have that tendency? Can he know when any Judge, or any twelve men, or any one man, will think that any writing will have such tendency? And yet, monstrous to relate, such writer, so bounden, is compared, as to his state of restraint, to the ship-owner, who gives bonds, that he will not take smuggled goods on board his ship!

It is manifest to the plain understanding of every man, that such a writer must be constantly under restraint. He never can know when he is endangering his friends, unless *he continually writes in favour of the Ministers and the Parliament*; and this is a pretty state of degradation; this is a pretty thing to be called *liberty of the press*! It is impossible for any writer to know what others (and especially after every thing has been done to stretch his meaning)

may think tending to bring the Parliament *into contempt*. There may be men to think, that what I am now writing has *such tendency*. To dispute any point with the Parliament; and, especially, to dispute it with *success*; especially to show that the Parliament has done *wrong*, or fallen into *error*. May there not be men to think, that all such writing has a tendency to bring the Parliament *into contempt*? Is not the writer of every petition, which shall complain of any law; is not every such man a "*seditious libeller*"? And, the Parliament having resolved and enacted, that the Bank shall pay in specie, must not he be a *seditious libeller*, who proves to demonstration, that the Bank *never can pay in specie*? Praise, then, is all we have left to bestow. We may praise as long as we please, but, according to this law, we are *free* to do nothing but that. If we write at all, we must take care not to be *silent*; for silence is one of the most efficacious ways of showing *contempt*. "*Better be damned than not be named at all*." Praise, praise, and that only is our safe course. And, even here we must *take care* of ourselves; for, as the same poet informs us, we may "*damn with faint praise*," more effectually, perhaps, than with censure. Unqualified and loud praise is, therefore, now the only thing that can insure our safety.

Such is the state, in which every writer is placed by the *previous* restraint imposed upon him. But, far more powerful is another means of restraint imposed by this same Act of Parliament.

A writer (or a printer or publisher, which latter includes all *sellers*) may now, if any man, upon oath, inform a Justice of the



Peace, that the writer, for instance, has written *what the Justice may deem a seditious libel*; a writer may instantly be held to bail, with sureties, to appear and answer the charge at the next quarter session. But, this is not all, the bonds are to include a condition *to be of good behaviour in the meanwhile!*

Now, then, what is the state of this famously free JOHN BULL with a pen in his hand! Any Justice can have a publication brought to him and sworn to. And, if he thinks it a seditious libel, he can, at once, bind the writer over, as above mentioned, or *plunge him into a jail at once*, upon his own authority and in consequence of his own uncontrouled opinion as to the *tendency* of the publication!

Pretty well so far; but we must not stop here: if we do, we shall not do a hundredth part of justice to this act of parliament. The Quarter Sessions arrive. A Bill of indictment is presented against this safety and firmly bounden writer. The Grand Jury throw out the Bill. They differ in opinion from the binding justice. They do not think the publication a seditious libel. But, the writer is not, perhaps, to go unpunished, merely because he was innocent. He was bound over, we will say, a month before the Sessions. A week before the Sessions he is bound over again for a second libel, upon which a bill is found; and he is convicted on this second libel. Having been so convicted, he has *forfeited his first recognizances*, he and his sureties are sued for them, and with a *certainty* of the crown's recovering. So that, he is punished with fine or imprisonment, or both, for his *guilt*; and he is punished with forfeited recogniz-

ances for his *innocence*! Nay, he may be punished for his innocence; he may be legally punished on a charge *proved to be false* before a Grand Jury, by even a shorter process than that of obtaining a conviction for a second libel. A writer, bound over on a charge, which a Grand Jury declares to be *false*, may, before the meeting of the Sessions, commit an *assault*; may be engaged in *riotous* conduct; may be guilty of *profane swearing*. These are all *breaches of the recognizances*: and thus, though he had published *no libel*; though a Grand Jury had declared the charge, on which he was bound over, *to be false*; still he might be punished and even ruined, for the publication!

To say, that the Parliament has passed such a law as this, may, perhaps, be thought to have a *tendency* to bring it into "*hatred or contempt*." But, must I, then, not say, that it has passed such a law? Or, must I praise such a law to the skies? Must I be a liar, or hold my tongue, lest I should be fined, imprisoned, or banished? Let those who have words to express their feelings here, express them: I have not. The whole vocabulary of our language affords not epithets and terms wherein justly to describe my feelings with regard to this law.

Yet, there are men, who have assurance enough to assert, that even this; aye *this*, is consonant with the spirit of the laws of England! Nay; they have said, that is *law*, and *always was law*. I have heard knavish, petty tyrants, in a *Republic*, assert the same thing. But (reserving this latter to be spoken of fully when I meet with any Reformer who shall have been misled into a love of republicanism), I defy the most

dustrious rummager into the records of misrule to find any decision, in the English Courts (except that of Star-Chamber) giving countenance to such an assertion; an assertion which is in itself, the foulest libel on the law.

WILKES was prosecuted for an *obscene* and *blasphemous* libel. He was held to be bail (before conviction) *to be of good behaviour*. He applied to the Court of King's Bench to release him from the bail, on the express ground, that bail could not legally be taken in case of libel, *before conviction*. LORD CAMDEN was the Chief Justice; and he delivered the opinion of the Court, which opinion was, that it was not lawful to demand bail for good behaviour, in cases of libel, *before conviction!* and that, therefore the *bail must be discharged*. And it *was discharged* accordingly. There is but one case, that I have ever heard of, in which bail, in case of libel, was insisted on. It was that of the *Seven Bishops*, in the reign of James the Second. They refused to give bail; they were sent to the Tower; three of the Judges were corrupt and decided against them; they were afterwards tried and *acquitted*; and their acquittal was the signal for the overthrow of the base and tyrannical king and councillors, who had thus stretched and violated the law. This *precedent*, therefore, is, one would think, a thing to be shunned and not to be followed.

But, if this binding over, in cases of libel, was *always law*, why did SIR VICKARY GIBBS bring in a bill, in 1808 (I think it was) to *authorize* the holding to bail to answer the charge, in cases of *misdemeanour*? Libel is a *misdemeanour*; if bail, in such cases,

could be *legally* demanded *before* 1808, why did Sir Vicary bring in this Bill? Observe, too, that this Bill gave no one but a *Judge* this power of holding to bail, before trial, for *misdemeanour*. And, not even to a Judge, unless in very *urgent cases*, and with very pointed *affidavits* before him. If the present law were *always the law*, what was the sense of this Bill? Lord Sidmouth's CIRCULAR first broached the doctrine of a power in Justices of the Peace to hold to bail, on charges of libel, even *to answer the charge*; and this Act, which we have now under examination, has completed the subjection and degradation of the press. For, according to this Act, every public writer, every printer, and every publisher, may now *legally* be held to bail, during the whole of his life, and may be punished many, many times in every year, by the forfeiture of recognizances, *given on charges of libel*, though it may, at the same time, be *legally proved*, that not one of them has ever published any libel at all! Can an *Imprimatur*; can a *Censorship*: can any thing short of a halter actually tied round our necks, be a greater *restraint* than this law?

It was my intention to pursue the subject into the other Acts providing for *confiscation* of property and for *banishment* of person. But what is the value of any other property compared with the property which men have in the use of their talents, the thoughts of their mind, and the feelings of their hearts? And, as to *banishment*, where is the man, who would not regard it as a blessed escape from this state of everlasting restraint?

And *why* have these laws been passed? Could not the press,



ninety-nine hundredths of which is absolutely devoted to the Government and the Church: could not the press have been left to correct itself? Could not the ninety-nine writers have been trusted to for a refutation of the hundredth; backed, as the former were, by the pulpit (sectarian as well as orthodox) and by the whole body of livern on the taxes?

The fact is, the Ministry finds itself surrounded with all sorts of difficulties; difficulties so great, so numerous, so complicated in their nature, and demanding in the way of remedy, measures so far beyond the scope and compass of its mind, and especially of any thing that it feels itself able to propose or support, that it is, like a strong man in a state of delirium, laying about it, back stroke and fore stroke, not knowing or caring what class it destroys, or what wounds it inflicts upon the character of the country.

This has been the true cause of the late month of angry legislation. Let us hope, that the six weeks, as it were taken to cool, will have produced a change of tone and a change of temper. The general disease of the country, is, *a want of reform*; the immediately pressing complaint, the *misery of the people*; of the whole of the people, the very rich and those who live upon the taxes excepted.

To remove this distress, and to restore the nation to prosperity, require measures, which, thus far, no man, in either house, has had the courage to propose. We have projects enough, high and low, from the seizure of the estates of the great down to the allotment of plots of ground to the poor: from the scheme for diminishing the quantity of food by Corn Bills down to the augmenting of it by

cultivating lands completely barren. These projects are so numerous, that to promise to notice every one separately (especially when we consider the new ones that may spring forth) is much more than I dare venture. But, in the course of these papers, I shall certainly notice such of them as appear to have attracted public attention and to have been able to produce any considerable portion of public delusion.

WM. COBBETT.

### CURIOUS HISTORY OF A CALUMNY ON PAINE.

It is a part of the business of a press, sold to the CAUSE OF CORRUPTION, to calumniate those, dead or alive, who have most effectually laboured against that cause; and, as PAINE was the most powerful and effectual of those labourers, so to calumniate him has been an object of their peculiar attention and care. Amongst other things said against this famous man, is, that he *recanted* before he died; and, that, in his last illness, he discovered horrible fears of death. This is, to be sure, a very good *answer* to what these same persons say about his *hardened infidelity*. But, it is a pure, unadulterated falshood. This falshood, which I shall presently trace to its origin (the heart of a *profound hypocrite*) was *cried* about the streets of *Liverpool*, when I landed there in November last. Thence it found its way to the grand receptacle and distributor of falshood and calumny, the *London press*, which has sent it all over this kingdom. One *Country paper*, however, pre-eminent in all that is *foul and mean*, affects to possess *original matter and authentic information* on the subject; and, indeed it *pledges* itself for the *character* of the "*gentleman*" from whom it says it *has received* the pretended authentic account. The *Country-paper* I al-

lude to is, the *Norwich Mercury*, printed and published by one BURKS; and the article on PAINE is as follows:

"The following statement has been handed to us by a Gentleman, whose character is a sufficient pledge that he would not put forth any article which he had not the best reason to believe to be true:—

"THOMAS PAINE.—The following is an extract of an *American* letter, the writer of which is of the most unquestionable respectability, and appears recently to have obtained the information it contains from authority equally entitled to credit:—The latter had resided in a family in the neighbourhood of the celebrated Thomas Paine, which, during his last illness, had contributed to his comfort by occasionally preparing and sending in food and refreshment better adapted to his situation than he usually enjoyed.—Of these the informant chose to be the bearer to his bedside, although his personal circumstances were so deplorable that the air of his chamber could scarcely be endured, and in performing this humane office had the opportunities of conversation with him, which authorized the writer's belief, that he exhibited another proof of Dr. Young's assertion, "that men may live fools, but fools they cannot die." The letter proceeds to say, that she found him frequently writing, and believed, from what she saw and heard, that when his pains permitted he was always so employed, or in prayer, in the attitude of which she more than once saw him when he thought himself alone. One day he enquired of her if she had ever read the "*Age of Reason*;" and on being answered in the affirmative, desired to know her opinion of that book.—She replied that she was but a child when she read it, and that he probably would not like to know what she thought of it; upon which he said, if old enough to read, she was capable of forming some opinion, and that from her he expected a candid statement of what that opinion had been. She then said, she thought it the most dangerous insinuating book she had ever read; that the more she read the more she wished to read, and the more she found her mind estranged from all that is good; and that from a conviction of its evil tendency she had burnt it, without knowing to whom it belonged.—Paine replied to this, that he wished all who had read it had been as wise as she; and added, "*if ever the Devil had an agent on earth, I have been one.*" At another time, when she was in his chamber, and the master of her family was sitting by his bed side, one of Paine's former companions came in; but seeing them, hastily went out, drawing the door after him with violence, and saying, "*Mr. Paine, you have lived like a man—I hope you will die like one.*" Upon which, Paine, turning to his

principal visitor, said, "you see what miserable comforters I have." An unhappy female, who had accompanied him from France, lamented her sad case, observing, "for this man I have given up my family and friends—my property and my religion; judge then of my distress, when he tells me that the principles he has taught me will not bear me out."

The *Norwich Mercury* did not imagine, that any one would take the pains to expose this tissue of falsehoods. In the first place, why does he not name his "*gentleman*" of such excellent character? How these informers skulk! Mr. Burks can pledge himself for the character of the "*gentleman*" informer; but, where are we to get a pledge for the character of Mr. Burks, who, if we are to judge from this act of his, stands in need of very good sponsors.

Let us look, a little, at the internal evidence of the falsehood of this story. Mr. PAINE possessed, at his death, an unencumbered estate of two hundred and fifty acres of land, not more than twenty miles from New York. He possessed a considerable sum besides. These he left by will. Will any one believe, that he was, on his dying bed, in want of proper nourishment, and that he was in a deplorable state as to apartments and necessities? Then, was it likely, that when a neighbour's maid servant went to carry him a little present of sweetmeats, or the like, that he would begin a conversation on theology with her? And, is it not monstrous to suppose, that he would call himself the devil's agent to HER, and not leave behind him any recantation at all, though he had such ample time for doing it; and thought his confidant was so ready to receive it and take care of it! The story is false upon the face of it; and, nothing but a simpleton, or something a great deal worse, would have given it circulation and affected to believe it to be true.

I happen to know the origin of this story; and I possess the real, original document, whence have proceeded the divers editions of the falsehood, of the very invention of which I was, perhaps, myself, the innocent cause!



About two years ago, I, being then on Long Island, published my intention of writing an account of the life, labours, and death of Paine. Soon after this, a Quaker at New York, named *Charles Collins*, made many applications for an interview with me, which at last, he obtained. I found that his object was to persuade me, that Paine had *recanted*. I laughed at him, and sent him away. But, he returned again and again to the charge. He wanted me to promise that I would say "that it was said," that Paine recanted. "No:" said I; "but, I will say, that you say it, and that you tell a lie unless you prove the truth of what you say; and, if you do that, I shall gladly insert the fact." This posed "friend Charley," whom I suspected to be a most consummate hypocrite. He had a sullen face, a *simper*, and manoeuvred his features, precisely like the most perfidious wretch that I have known or ever read or heard of. He was precisely the reverse of my honest, open, and sincere Quaker friends, the PAULS of Pennsylvania. Friend Charley plied me with remonstrances and reasonings; but, I always answered him. "Give me proof; name persons; state times; state precise words; or, I denounce you as a liar." Thus put to his trumps, friend Charley resorted to the aid of a person of his own stamp; and, at last, he brought me a paper, containing matter, of which the above statement of Mr. BURKS is a *garbled edition*! This paper, very cautiously and craftily drawn up, contained only the initials of names. This would not do. I made him, at last, put down the full name and the address of the informer, "MARY HINSDALE, No. 10, Anthony-street, New York." I got this from friend Charley, some time about June last; and had no opportunity of visiting the party till late in October, just before I sailed.

The informer was a Quaker woman, who, at the time of Mr. PAINE's last illness, was a servant in the family

of Mr. WILLIET HICKS, an eminent merchant, a man of excellent character, a Quaker, and even, I believe, a Quaker Preacher. Mr. HICKS, a kind and liberal and rich man, visited Mr. PAINE in his illness, and, from his house, which was near that of Mr. PAINE, little nice things (as is the practice in America) were sometimes sent to him; of which this servant, friend Mary, was the bearer, and this was the way, in which the lying cant got into the room of Mr. Paine.

To "friend Mary," therefore, I went, on the 26th of October last, with friend Charley's paper in my pocket. I found her in a lodging in a back-room up one pair of stairs. I knew that I had no common cunning to set my wit against. I began with all the art that I was master of. I had got a prodigiously broad-brimmed hat on. I patted a little child that she had sitting beside her; I called her *friend*; and played all the awkward tricks of an undisciplined wheedler. But, I was compelled to come quickly to *business*. She asked, "what's thy name, friend?" and, the moment I said *William Cobbett*, up went her mouth as tight as a purse! Sack-making appeared to be her occupation; and that I might not extract through her eyes that which she was resolved I should not get out of her mouth, she went and took up a sack, and began to *sew*: and not another look or glance could I get from her.

However, I took out my paper, read it, and, stopping at several points, asked her if it was *true*. Talk of the *Jesuits*, indeed! The whole tribe of LOYOLA, who have shaken so many kingdoms to their base, never possessed a millionth part of the cunning of this drab-coloured little woman, whose face simplicity and innocence seemed to have chosen as the place of their triumph! She shuffled; she evaded; she equivocated; she warded off; she affected not to understand me, not to understand the paper, not to remember: and all this with so much seem-

ing simplicity and single-heartedness, and in a voice so mild, so soft, and so sweet, that, if the Devil had been sitting where I was, he would certainly have jumped up and hugged her to his bosom !

The result was : that it was *so long ago*, that she could not speak *positively* to any part of the matter : that she *would not say that any part of the paper was true* : that she had *never seen the paper* : and, that she had never given "friend Charley" (for so she called him) authority to say *any thing about the matter in her name*. I pushed her closely upon the subject of the "*unhappy French Female*." Asked her, whether she should *know her again*.—"Oh, no ! friend : I tell thee, that I have *no recollection* of any person or any thing that I saw at THOMAS PAINE'S house." The truth is, that the cunning little thing knew that the French lady was at hand ; and that *detection* was easy, if she had said that she should know her upon sight !

I had now nothing to do but to bring friend Charley's nose to the grindstone. But, Charley, who is a grocer, living in Cherry-street, near Pearl-street, though so pious a man, and, doubtless, in great haste to get to everlasting bliss, had *moved out of the city for fear of the fever*, not liking, apparently, to go off to the next world in a yellow skin. And thus he escaped me, who sailed from New York in four days afterwards : or, Charley should have found, that there was something else, on this side the grave, pretty nearly as troublesome and as dreadful as the Yellow Fever.

This is, I think, a pretty good instance of the lengths to which hypocrisy will go. The whole, as far as relates to recantation, and to the "*unhappy French female*," is a lie, from the beginning to the end. Mr. PAINE declares, in his last Will, that he retains all his publicly expressed opinions as to religion. His Execut-

ors, and many other gentlemen of undoubted veracity had the same declaration from his dying lips. Mr. WILLET HICKS visited him to nearly the last. This gentleman says, that there was no change of opinion intimated to him : and, will any man believe, that PAINE would have withheld from Mr. HICKS, that which he was so forward to communicate to Mr. Hicks's servant girl ?

Observe, reader, that, in this tissue of falshoods, is included a most foul and venomous slander on a woman of virtue and of spotless honour. But, hypocrites will stick at nothing. Calumny is their weapon, and a base press is the hand to wield it. Mr. BURKS of Norwich will not insert this article, nor will he acknowledge his error. He knows, that the calumny, which he has circulated, has done what he intended it to do ; and he and the "*gentleman*" for whose character he pledges himself, will wholly disregard good men's contempt, so long as it does not diminish their gains.

This is not at all a question of religion. It is a question of moral truth. Whether MR. PAINE'S opinions were correct, or erroneous, has nothing to do with this matter.

WM. COBBETT.

## TO THE KING.

London, January 31st, 1820.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY,

I have this day witnessed the ceremony of proclaiming your Majesty King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland ; to which, had not unwise and evil councillors existed twenty years ago, would have been added the word France ; a part of the title which your Royal Father inherited from his predecessors, and which, in my opinion, ought never to have been given up ; because, in the affairs of nations, particularly, *honour* ought to be



valued as highly as existence itself.

To subjects of more immediate importance at this time, I take the liberty to endeavour to call your Majesty's attention; a liberty which I am compelled to take in this public manner, or to refrain from doing that which I regard as being my duty to do. Your Majesty ascends the Throne at a period of unexampled embarrassment, difficulty and distress. You become the King of a great nation, at a time when it is seriously doubted, by a great number of persons of sound heads, great experience, great information and very extensive views, whether this great nation be or be not destined to experience a decline of weight and of power such as very few nations, of which we have any knowledge, have ever experienced.

Under such circumstances, an accession to the Throne would appear, at first sight, to be an elevation hardly to be envied. But if we rightly consider the matter, this is, perhaps, taking an entirely wrong view of it. As it is more glorious in an army to wear the laurels won on an occasion where there is every reason to expect its defeat: so it will certainly be more glorious to your Majesty, if you should, so I pray God you may, see, during your reign, this harrassed and miserable nation restored to tranquillity and happiness, and to the enjoyment of that freedom, which our fathers enjoyed at the time when his late Majesty ascended the Throne.

In order, however, that this restoration may be effected, and that your reign may be happy and glorious, great changes must take place in the management of the affairs of this nation. Merely to

point out the whole of these changes with sufficient clearness, and in language and manner suitable, on an occasion like the present, would be a task too voluminous to be attempted at this moment. Yet, there is one change or two, which, as they seem to present themselves with peculiar claims to attention, I shall endeavour to point out; and, as they relate to matters of somewhat a personal nature, I put in, beforehand, an earnest request, that my words may receive the most liberal interpretation.

I am sure I speak the sense of the people of this kingdom in general, when I say that our having, of late years, been deprived of the use of the right to Petition the King and the Regent, has produced great injury with regard to the feelings of the people towards the Sovereign; and also great injury with regard to the administering of the affairs of the country. No human institution can be perfect. Abuses will arise in every such institution. A man may be unjustly treated by a constable, by a justice of the peace, by a court of law. But, still he may petition the Parliament. The Parliament may turn a deaf ear to him. Some wrong influence may prevail even there. Still, however, he has the King to Petition; and it is the King, whose office it is at last to afford him redress.

There is something so manifestly just and reasonable in this, that I believe that there never yet was a nation in which it was not the practice for any man to be able at any time to present a petition to the Chief Ruler of such a nation. In the Bill of Rights, this right of *petitioning the King* forms one of the items of the un-

alienable rights of Englishmen; and, indeed, that a man should be held bound in ties of *allegiance* to one, to whom he is not permitted to put up even his *prayers*, is something too monstrous for common sense to conceive or common spirit to endure.

Yet, may it please your Majesty, it appears to me that this right, if not absolutely denied to us in words, has been so much abridged, and the performance of it reduced to so much uncertainty, that the great mass of your Majesty's subjects can with difficulty look upon themselves as enjoying it at all. According to a regulation, which has been adopted of late years, our petitions to the King are to be delivered to the *Secretary of State*: or given to his Majesty, or, in his behalf, to the Regent) at the *levee*. It is very well known that very few persons, indeed, comparatively speaking, can gain admission to a *levee*. The great body of the people are, indeed, wholly excluded from it. It is a thing of which they know nothing except by hearsay. And, therefore the Secretary of State is the only channel through which their petitions can pass.

It is manifest that, under such circumstances, no person will consider this mode of petitioning as coming up to what is properly called the exercise of the Right of Petition. The petitioner is by no means certain that his petition will ever reach the King. He knows very well that his petition will first be read and well examined by the Secretary of State: this Secretary is one of the Ministry; and, as every petition will be likely to contain a complaint of some grievance or some wrong, arising from the miscon-

duct, or negligence of the Ministry, or of some person in power under them, it is obvious that there must be a natural disinclination on the part of the Ministry to suffer the petition to meet the eye of his master; and the more true and the more important the matter of the petition may be, the less likely it is that the Secretary should be disposed to lay it before the King; nay, the Secretary now seems to be relieved from all chances of inconveniences on this score; for according to a recent letter of his, it appears that, whether he shall lay before the King or not, depends wholly upon his own discretion. So that, it would appear that to this it is come, at last; an Englishman's right to petition the King; a right, which, at the revolution, was declared to be inherent and unalienable, is now reduced to a right to petition the Secretary of State: though it may happen that this Englishman's complaint, as contained in his petition, relates to some grievous oppression experienced at the hands of that Secretary himself.

Petitions are not, like some other modes of application, answered. No answer is given to them, or, at least, no acknowledgment of their being right; and no immediate assurance that the prayer of them will be granted.—The petitioner is, in all cases, left to entertain the supposition that his petition will receive due attention and have its just weight.—When the prayer of it is not granted, no positive refusal is given; and this, as far as relates to petitions to the King, is the most dignified and most gracious mode of proceeding. All that the petitioner can reasonably require in the first instance, is to know for a certainty, that his petition



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has been received by the King; but this he cannot now know; and therefore, he is as completely cut off from all hope of redress, to be received from the crown, as if there was no crown in existence.

One injurious effect of this regulation, so new to Englishmen, and so contrary to all their settled notions of liberty and justice, is a diminution in the warmth of their attachment towards the sovereign himself, whom they cease, by degrees, to regard as their last hold of safety. They have enough to remind them of his power and of their obedience to his authority. They do not fail duly to receive his commands and to hear his injunctions not to resist those commands. They are warned upon occasions frequent enough, of the honour that they are to do him; and they know well how numerous and how great are the punishments inflicted in his name. And, if they are to be deprived, though under the most grievous oppression, to make known to him the wrongs which they suffer, it is to expect more than human nature allows us to expect not to believe that they will entertain towards the King less warmth of attachment than they would entertain, if they could, at their pleasure, appeal to his own justice for redress. God himself, if he were only a God of terror, would not be adored, except by beings wholly unworthy to live.

This prohibition to present petitions in person to the King has the further disadvantage belonging to it, that (whatever may be the fact) it is looked upon as a prohibition coming from the King himself, and, coming so closely in contact with his very person, it must be supposed to be a matter with which he has personally

something to do. For a King to say to his subjects, what this prohibition, if fully expressed, seems to say, would certainly be very little calculated to gain or to preserve the affections of any people, and particularly of a people, who, in spite of every thing that has been done, or that can be done, to lower them in their own esteem, are still a proud people, and a people always prone to resent every act and every word which seems to imply contempt or disdain. As I am very well satisfied that this prohibition never did originate in the mind of your Majesty, and has not been continued by any particular desire of yours, I do not impute it to you; but, certain I am that its effect upon the minds of the people of this country has been very injurious, and that every day of its continuance, especially now, will add to an evil already gone to an extent far beyond what your Majesty can possibly imagine.

But there is another great evil attending this prohibition. There are grievances to be prevented as well as grievances to be redressed. Ministers, and other persons in authority may be guilty of sins of omission as well as of commission. There may be persons quite unknown to your Majesty, whose zeal and ability, though voluntarily exerted, may, upon particular occasions, be of infinite utility to the King, as well as to the nation. Yet such persons, for want of the power to make their representations to the King, may, with regard to him, and to the country, uselessly possess such zeal and such ability. Many have been the occasions when I could have rendered great service to the country, had the channel of petition been open to me: of two

instances only, I will, at this time trouble your Majesty with the mention.

In the year 1812, when it was evident to me, that, if the Ministry pursued their then measures, a war with the United States of America was inevitable, I used, through the means of the press, my best exertions to prevent that war. The party in opposition to the Ministry, pledged themselves to support the war upon a certain contingency, which they thought would not arrive. I knew that it would arrive; and, therefore, I endeavoured to convince both the parties that they were wrong; that war would come; that the progress of that war would be disappointment and defeat; and that the result would be enormous loss and everlasting disgrace. The whole nation will bear witness to my strenuous labours to prevent that war, and it will also bear witness that I laboured *alone*.

Upwards of *seventy millions of money*, now making part of our hideous Debt; upwards of seventy millions of money expended in that war, and now forming a part of the irredeemable mortgage of the lands and labour of the people of this kingdom; great as this was, it was nothing compared with the *disgrace* of that war, which remains written in the history of numerous battles by land, and still more legibly written in more numerous battles by sea: the history of which battles an Englishman will never be able to look at without feeling his cheek burn with shame. At the outset of that war, one of the then Lords of the Admiralty, Sir JOSEPH SIDNEY YORKE, vauntingly said, in the House of Commons, that we had the President of America to *depose* before

we could lay down our arms! This was answered by the calm disdain of the President, and by the thunder from the American ships. Then it was, for the first time since England was England, that Englishmen were beaten, gun for gun and man for man.

I cannot bring myself to believe, that, if your Majesty had read what it was then in my power to write to you, in the form of petition, that war would ever have been begun. I possessed knowledge upon the subject which your Ministers did not possess. I knew what the result would be before the first shot was fired. I was in possession of facts, the bare statement of which must have convinced any man open to conviction, that defeat was certain. These facts I could not disclose in print. To disclose them to a man like Mr. PERCEVAL, the very sound of whose name I abhorred, was hardly to be expected; but, besides this, I despised him on account of his arrogance, insolence, and total want of judgment and of talent. Add to this, a firm conviction in my own mind, founded upon positive assurance, as well as upon reason and experience, that every thing urged by me against any measure, was, with the Ministers, a strong inducement to persevere in it. It has been thus, in several instances; and I have little scruple in saying (however presumptuous it may be deemed) that a very considerable portion of the calamities which the nation has to endure at this day, may be truly ascribed to a rejection of salutary measures proposed by me. A spirit of haughtiness has prevailed; and to that spirit we may fairly attribute a great part of our sufferings.

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When your Majesty was a youth, occasionally rambling with two of your brothers and your tutor, about Kew Gardens, I was a little boy, in a blue smock-frock, working in those gardens; and I remember that you passed me once when I was sweeping the grass-plat round the foot of the Pagoda. But, since that time, I have seen a great deal of this world; I have seen more of mankind, in all their various situations, than most men have seen. I have been a very attentive observer; a very accurate retainer of all that I have observed. I have been very communicative, and have found, in all ranks and degrees, every body that knew me ready to impart to me their thoughts. Always ready to repose confidence in others, I have sometimes been deceived and betrayed; but I have never been intimate with that human being who was not ready, almost at first sight, to repose confidence in me. Hence, and from the resources of my industry, and my delight in labour of all sorts, a stock of knowledge has accrued, which was unavoidable unless nature had deprived me of the common capacity of comprehending and remembering.

But your Ministers seem to have had the little blue smock-frock continually in their eye, and to have thought it beneath their high mightinesses to condescend to listen to any thing coming from an origin so low. They, who, for the far greater part, had never exchanged the purlieu of a county and the chicanery and wrangling of a Quarter Sessions for any thing but the smoke and buz of London, were, nevertheless, as full of conceit as if they had occasionally resided in different nations and had studied the man-

ners, feelings and interests of all classes of mankind.

To this one cause, I ascribe a very considerable part of the Debt, and the whole of those laws against popular liberty, and particularly the liberty of the press, which now make England appear like any thing but England. But, at any rate, I know for certain that, at the time of beginning the late disgraceful war against America, one man in authority actually said: "we shall now beat these Americans; and that will destroy COBBETT'S credit for ever." Monstrous as this may seem, I know the fact to be true; and as a truth, I solemnly state it in an address to your Majesty.

Therefore, I could have no hope, that any petition or memorial, addressed to the Ministers, would be of any use. They would, I knew, spurn at it; and, as I had no means of approaching your Majesty with a petition, the facts have remained in my own bosom; the war took place; and the fatal result we have to deplore.

Upon another occasion, not much less important, I wrote, and caused to be printed, a petition, addressed to your Majesty. I allude to the petition written in America, not published there, but published in England, with regard to the struggle going on in the South American provinces.—But that the petition contained a very small part of the knowledge which I possessed upon the subject. Though living in a very obscure part of the country, gentlemen from South America, agents from the Provinces, found me out. I had opportunities of knowing every thing relating to the contest; relating to the views and wishes of the insurgents; and

I was put in possession of numerous most interesting facts, accompanied with an anxious expression of the desire of the parties that I would cause them to be communicated to the government in England. I could undertake nothing of the kind. I had no channel of communication but LORD SIDMOUTH, and men like LORD SIDMOUTH. The facts, therefore, remained with myself; a series of measures, the contrary of what I should have petitioned for have been pursued; and the result will be as heavy a blow as the greatness of this kingdom ever received.

Could I have entertained the smallest hope of my petition reaching the hand of your Majesty, I should have dispatched a son as the bearer of it, notwithstanding the dungeons were still open to receive every one, whom your Ministers might chuse to imprison on *suspicion* of treasonable designs. But, having left, of my unalienable Right of Petition, nothing but the Right of Petitioning LORD SIDMOUTH, the duty which I would have performed remained unperformed; and the Gulf of Mexico will now be passed by a British fleet only by sufferance, if it ever again pass that Gulph at all.

These, may it please your Majesty, are only amongst a few of the evils which naturally arise out of this not very gracious curtailment of the last resource, in the way of right, left to an oppressed subject. A new reign ought to begin with acts of grace; and, though I anxiously hope that the first exercise of your Royal Prerogative will be to open the prison doors to those who have been imprisoned for political of-

fences; I hope not much less anxiously that your own Royal hand will be again opened freely and graciously to receive, agreeably, I am sure, to the dictates of your own heart, our humble and dutiful petitions. I am,

Your Majesty's

Dutiful and faithful subject,

WM. COBBETT.

### DEATH OF THE KING.

His Majesty expired, it appears, at Windsor Castle, on Saturday evening, the 29th instant, at half-past eight o'clock, *in the eighty-second year of his age, and in the fifty-ninth year of his reign*; having been born in the year 1738, and having ascended the throne in the year 1760.

In the remarks which I have to offer upon this event, I shall probably differ from many of my contemporary writers; but, it offers an occasion for laying before the Public, truths which I deem of an useful nature: it is, therefore, my duty to lay those truths before it; and I trust that fear of clamour, will never prevent me from discharging any part of my duty.

It would be impertinent in me to pretend that I feel any *sorrow* upon this occasion. All the circumstances considered, if it had been my own father, whose decease, in place of that of his Majesty, I had now to announce, I should be afraid to express any feelings of sorrow, lest I should be taken for a fool or a hypocrite. I should thank God that he had released my parent from a state, the prolongation of which could be viewed by no rational man as any thing other than a very serious calamity. I cannot, for my part,



bring myself to entertain even a good opinion of persons, (especially those not connected with his Majesty by ties of blood), who pretend to be oppressed with grief upon this occasion. However clearly we may be convinced that the death of our parents or children is a great good to themselves, reason, when the moment comes, will give way to the weakness of nature. But, is it not impertinence, as well as affectation in us, who never can have known any thing even of the private character of his Majesty; and who by no possibility, can have contracted for him any personal affection; is it not, in us, impertinence as well as affectation, to pretend that we are overcome by those feelings, which, in the case of parents, children, wives and personal friends, are allowed to lay reason asleep for the moment, and lead men to express their sorrow at events which ought to be a subject of joy?

Decorum, good manners, a feeling of respect for the office of the King, and also a feeling of respect towards his successor, and the rest of his Royal Family; all these call upon us, on an occasion like this, for a grave and serious deportment, and for those outward marks of veneration even for deceased Roy-

alty, which we are not called upon to show on the demise of common men, however highly they may have been respected in their lives and how well soever they may have deserved that respect. But, if we carry the thing further, and, pretend that our feelings are engaged in the matter, all the world sees that we are guilty of affectation, not to call it by the harder name of hypocrisy, and they turn from our lugubrious whine with contempt and disdain.

Much higher duties, however, has the public writer to perform in such a case; for, let it be borne in mind that the pages of to day become the documents of posterity. Kings and Princes and all rulers, enjoy, during their lives, innumerable things withheld from common men. And, therefore, it is just that, when that enjoyment comes to an end, the acts of their lives should be more freely canvassed than the acts of common men.

As to the *private* character of his Majesty, I know full as much as my countrymen in general, and that is, just nothing at all. If it is to discover a degree of immodesty, rendering the party dead to all feelings of shame, to pretend to know any thing of the character of a personage that the party has never been able to ap-

proach. His Majesty's private character I know nothing of; I have never known any thing of it; and therefore, nothing can I truly say of it; and not being able to say any thing truly of it (except by mere guess), nothing will I say of it.

Indeed, this is a matter with which we, the subjects of the King, have nothing at all to do. And, if we take but a moment to reflect, we shall see the great danger of our impertinently pretending to meddle, one way or the other, with the private character of a chief Magistrate. If we are to praise him for a good private character, does it not follow that we are to censure him, if he have a bad private character? If we are to obey him with the more willingness and alacrity, on account of his good private character, are we not placed in danger of unwillingness to obey him at all, if his character should happen to be bad? And, let it be borne in mind, that unwillingness to obey is only one short step from *resistance*! Yet, what mischiefs; mischiefs how great and how numerous, and how dreadful in their results, have not arisen from this fatal political error of confounding the private character with the public functions of men in power; ma-

gistrates of all descriptions, and especially those of Princes and of Kings!

This is a matter wholly out of our province. The relationship between us and our King, is that of subject and Sovereign; and partake, not, in the smallest degree, of any of those ties which are not purely political. I, therefore, keeping these principles in view, shall now proceed to submit to the public some few observations relative to the acts and events of his Majesty's reign, which reign, instead of having been *glorious*, as some persons have thought proper to declare it to be, has, in my opinion, been *inglorious* in the extreme.

I wish to premise, however, that I ascribe to his late Majesty, none of the acts of his reign; and, of course, none of their fatal consequences. To do this would be to remove the responsibility from where the law and constitution have lodged it, and to place it where it never was yet placed by any faithful subject or sensible man. Our government is not a *monarchy*, which means a government in one single person. It is a mixed political government, at the head of which we have a King, whom the law presumes incapable of doing wrong towards



his people, while it gives him Ministers, who are, in their own persons, responsible for every act done in his name. To praise the King on account of some acts, implies a perfect right to censure him on account of other acts.— Therefore we must speak of the acts, merely as the acts of his reign, leaving him wholly out of the question.

Keeping this doctrine steadily in our minds, let us take a short review of the acts and events of the reign of his late Majesty, which, as it has been of uncommon duration, has witnessed an uncommon portion of events; and, as we shall find, has seen a change in the affairs of this kingdom, which it is impossible for any man sincerely attached to his country not deeply to deplore.

His late Majesty ascended the Throne under circumstances the most auspicious that ever accompanied the elevation of man. It was towards the close of a war the most completely victorious that the nation had ever known. The pride of France had been humbled by his grand-father's fleets and plain-dressed soldiers. The King himself was the first of his family a *Briton born*; and it might truly be said that he put on the brightest diadem that ever adorned the

brow of a sovereign. A most honourable and advantageous peace soon put an end to the war, and enabled him, though his dominions had been greatly extended, to secure the peace and safety of his dominions, uphold the splendour of his throne and maintain his high station amongst the Potentates of Europe, with a military establishment so trifling as hardly to be worthy of the name of an army. Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and other territories had been added to the possessions of his crown; and yet the whole of the taxes raised in the kingdom during the year, amounted to not double the sum which is now annually paid in the shape of wages to tax-gatherers only!

At the end of a few years of peace, evil councillors, in evil hour urged their sovereign into violent contentions with his subjects in the American colonies. Those subjects had, as is usually the case with regard to colonists, been even more strongly attached to their sovereign than those who were placed nearer the throne. They had, in the late war, expended most liberally their blood, as well as their treasure, voluntarily in his service and for his honour; and without their aid, that war might probably have ended

in disgrace instead of glory. For these generous sacrifices; these marks of fidelity and attachment, they were requited with attempts to compel them to bear taxation without representation. Attached to freedom from their infancy: not less enlightened than they were generous and brave: not less resolute in maintaining their own rights than they had been generous and devoted in maintaining those of their King, they, after having exhausted, to its very sands, the source of petition and remonstrance, took up arms in defence of those rights.

To subdue them, or, as was the phrase of the day, to compel them to submit to be *bound in all cases whatsoever*, by a legislature in which they were permitted to have not a single representative, fleets and armies were sent forth from England, joined by German armies paid out of the taxes of England: fire, sword, famine and false money were spread over their land. After a long and bloody struggle, the colonists triumphed. Liberty bore away the palm; English fleets and armies, so lately crowned with laurels on that same continent, now retired from the contest covered with disgrace.

Out of this event has arisen an

independent nation, the rival of Britain in commerce and in naval power: and, perhaps, the day is far less distant than some men must imagine when the armies of that nation may invade this kingdom in return.

When his late Majesty ascended the throne, the annual interest of the National Debt was little more than *four millions and a half*; it is now *more than thirty-two millions*. At that time the whole of the taxes collected in the year, amounted to little more than *eight millions and a half*. They now amount to *fifty-three millions* (exclusive of more than four millions paid in wages to the tax-gatherers); and even these fifty-three millions leave a deficiency of more than eight millions.

But, some one will say, if the taxes have been increased in amount, the means of paying them have also been increased. The *positive* means have, but the *relative* means have not. Rich and poor are relative terms. The man whose estate renders him one hundred a year, and whose outgoings are confined within that sum, is richer than the man whose estates are worth a hundred thousand a year, and whose outgoings are extended beyond his income. *Rich and poor*, are not terms to be made use of in considering the af-



airs of a nation. Happiness and misery are the terms ; and as the criterion of the sum of happiness and misery which existed at the time of his Majesty's ascending the Throne, and those existing at the time of his demise ; is to be looked for in the relative amount of the poor-rates of England and Wales, let the following facts be remembered : when the King ascended the Throne, the poor-rates amounted to *one million a year* ; and they now amount to more, perhaps, than *fifteen millions a year* ; while, besides this enormous demand, every creature with a pound in his pocket, is called upon for voluntary contributions to stifle the incessant cries of starving millions.

Ah ! my countrymen ! must we keep silence ; must we choak with the words that we could utter ! No ; let us, at any rate, if there be, as we are told, no cure for our sufferings, indulge in the last sad privileges of degraded nature in crying out, and uttering our sighs and groans. If, when his Majesty ascended the Throne, some one had told him to check the honest exultations into which he could not, in the ardour of his youth, refrain from bursting out ; if some one, in that happy hour, had said to him, "be not too vain, young

Prince ; exult not too much in the thought of ruling over this industrious, laborious, ingenious, frank, brave and happy people ; for, before your days be numbered, they shall be a mass of human beings the most wretched on which the sun ever shone. Their boasted independence of spirit, and the solidity of their dealings shall flee like the sands of the desert before the chicanery and craft of taxation and paper money. Their boasted freedom shall go staggering along under blow after blow ; 'till at last, ere the tardy messenger of death shall summon you away, Englishmen shall not dare to meet to discuss matters appertaining to their rights without being superintended by persons having authority to make them disperse upon pain of transportation ; and, as to the expression of their opinions upon paper, if, per chance, they should utter that which may be thought to have a tendency to bring either House of Parliament into contempt, they shall be liable to be banished for life. Bridle, therefore, your exultation, young Prince ; for, from this now happy England, shall its natives petition to be transported to seek refuge from their

"misery amongst savages in the  
"snows of Canada, or in the Afri-  
"can sands." If any one had said  
this to his late Majesty, during his  
walks at Kew, in the bloom of his  
life, would he not have answered:  
"Away, lying prophet; that  
"which thou foretellest is as im-  
"possible as that the sun should  
"shed darkness instead of light!"

However, let us never despair  
of any thing that we ought to che-  
rish; and, above all things, let us  
never despair of our country; let  
us say with our mouths, and ac-  
company the words with the wishes  
of our hearts: "GOD SAVE  
"KING GEORGE THE  
"FOURTH!" And, that we  
may not be hypocrites, let us,  
when we dare, and as far as we  
dare, tell him honestly what we  
think of the conduct of his ser-  
vants, and aid him, as far as we are  
able and are permitted to aid him,  
in endeavouring to restore our  
country to freedom and to happi-  
ness, and thereby using the only  
sure means of giving tranquillity  
to his reign and dignity and safety  
to his Throne.

WM. COBBETT.

COBBETT'S EVENING POST.

12 February, 1820.

The Press has been called the  
*guardian of public morals.* And,

though, in the conduct of the Lon-  
don daily press, for some time  
past, during which time that press  
has been the vehicle of garbled  
statements, relative to a man's  
most private affairs, and has been  
in co-operation with perfidious  
men who have been abandoned  
enough to make a boast of being  
guilty of *breaches of private confi-*  
*dence*; though, in the conduct of  
this press, it has been very diffi-  
cult to discover any very good  
proofs of its being the guardian of  
public morals; and though a like  
proof has not been very easy to be  
discovered in the very liberal use  
of the words apostate, miscreant,  
blasphemer, villain, and the like,  
against a man upon whom they  
were unable to prove any one sin-  
gle instance of irreligion, immoral-  
ity or indecency: though this press  
has not, for some years past, me-  
rited the high title above mention-  
ed; and though I do not flatter  
myself ever to see it merit much  
commendation; I have to con-  
gratulate the public in general  
and our friends the Reformers, in  
particular, that this press has,  
within the space of the *last nine*  
*days*, discovered some favourable  
symptoms of amendment. It has  
ceased its outrageous and inde-  
cent abuse. It has refrained from  
again dipping into private account



books; from publishing lists of mortgages and book-debts; from being the vehicle of accounts of arrests and of forgeries pretending to be old private letters, which, if authentic, must necessarily have *been stolen*, and must as necessarily have been communicated by *a thief*. It has ceased this part of its almost daily practice; and for this salutary change in its conduct the scandalized public has to thank *this paper*; which has operated with regard to this most "respectable" part of the press in exactly the same way that a good heavy stone taken up by a man pursued by a barking cur, operates upon the conduct of that cur. The cur becomes, under such circumstances, silent and good-mannered: at least, he ceases from his pursuit; and thus has it happened with this part of the press.

Generally speaking, a daily newspaper is worse than a weekly newspaper, so far as falsehoods told every day are more mischievous than falsehoods told once a week. But, a newspaper containing true intelligence, and remarks just as well as prompt upon all that passes, is certainly a most useful thing. And, my paper, I hope, will be of this sort; and, I think, that at this crisis it

will be of the greatest service to the country. The prevention of falsehoods is one effect of it, and the conveying of truth is another. I recommend to the Reformers to join, in half-dozens, dozens, twenties, or thirties, as it happen; to apply to some one (if it be in the country) who is known in town, to order it of a news-man; and, they may take my word for it, that they will then be far better informed than those who do not do the same.

WM. COBBETT.

#### SEAT IN PARLIAMENT.

My readers will see what I have said on this subject. I have stated fairly to the people my reasons for wishing to be placed in Parliament, and I think they may by this time have a pretty tolerable opinion of what I could do there. But, the acting when there, and the getting there, are two different things. The services I could render cannot be rendered unless *I be put* there; and this depends upon the people. I know the peoples' minds are made up upon it, and it now only wants a little *individual exertion*. Only think, if every one were *to do something*! And in return for this (which

would secure success, mind,) what might you have from me ! I have offered myself for the City of Coventry, and have pledged myself to stand the election, let who will have the impudence to oppose us ; and if such there be, difficult shall be his task. But, though I shall do my best, I cannot do all *myself*. The people of Coventry are a public-spirited people, and always have been. But they are not all of them on the spot ; and it will be necessary to raise the means to carry down the voters from London. They have been so worn down by corruption that great numbers of them are left almost destitute ; besides, it would be unjust to expect them to go at their own expence. They will do their parts by going to Coventry to vote for me, if the peo-

ple of England will afford them the means.

I therefore do urge the Reformers to bestir themselves. I am anxious upon this subject because there is no time to be lost. It is suggested to me by some of the Electors in Town who have formed themselves into a committee, to recommend to you, in Town and Country, to form little *sub-committees* of six, or a dozen of friends, as it may happen, to make collections ; and then the sums which you collect you should send without loss of time, directed to me, at the office of Cobbett's Evening Post, London, or to be left for the Committee (by those who are in the neighbourhood) at the Jacob's Wells Tavern, Barbican, where the Committee meet.

WM. COBBETT.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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